Transforming fear into peace –

The blessings of Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya

My personal experiences of the past few weeks

By Abid Khan

Introduction

The past couple of months have been a time of immense highs and also devastating lows.

With the Grace of Allah, the *Jalsa Salana UK* took place after two years, as did the *Ijtemas* of *Majlis Ansarullah UK, Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya* and *Lajna Imaillah UK*. Huzoor's Virtual Mulaqats and various other activities continued. As I write these words, the Germany Jalsa is just a few days away, where Huzoor will Insha'Allah deliver a live address.

Yet, as many will be aware, on 23 August 2021 my nephew, Syed Taalay Ahmed, was shot whilst on MTA duty in Ghana and a few hours later, in the early hours of 24 August 2021, embraced martyrdom. *Inna lillahe wa inna illaihi rajeoon*.

Ahmadis across the world will have seen the Friday Sermon of 3 September 2021 and heard the words of tribute delivered by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) testifying to the righteousness and sincerity of Taalay's character.

After his passing, I considered writing an article about Taalay and the qualities I observed in him. However, upon reflection, I thought of how whenever we worked together on any project, it was always our effort to shine a light on the blessings of Khilafat.

Moreover, after Huzoor's Friday Sermon testifying to the righteousness and sincerity of Taalay's character, any contribution from me is unnecessary.

Thus, rather than to write just about him, I have written in the following pages, about Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) and some of my experiences or observations with Khilafat during these past few weeks.

Knowing Taalay's utter devotion for the sake of Khilafat, I am quite sure that he himself would have preferred this as well.

These past few weeks, I have seen first-hand how the Khalifa-Waqt is there for his people at their darkest hour and at their times of grief to raise them up and to give them the strength and ability to move forward.

Certainly, I know my own state during those days and I am certain that without the support and love of Khilafat, it would have been impossible for me to cope or to move forward.

I have seen, how the Khalifa-Waqt puts aside any personal grief he may feel and ensures that the work and mission of the Jamaat of the Promised Messiah (as) does not pause even for a moment.

I have seen how where the Khalifa-Waqt is he who shields others from their grief and pain, he himself turns only to Allah the Almighty for solace and comfort.

Thus, here, I wish to mention how during those devastating days and ever since, I have witnessed the love, grace, compassion of Khalifatul Masih towards Taalay's wife, children, parents, family members, colleagues and friends and also share a few other moments where I was able to learn from Huzoor and seek his guidance and blessings in recent weeks.

Seeing Huzoor's farm

A few days prior to the Jalsa Salana UK, Huzoor called me to Islamabad for some work. Once, the work was complete, Huzoor permitted me to stay in his office for a few more minutes.

As he was going through his mail, Huzoor mentioned a letter he had received from an Ahmadi enquiring the source of Huzoor's personal income. I was very disturbed to hear that an Ahmadi would harbour such curiosities or concerns. Even if asked out of innocent curiosity, in my view, it did not behove an Ahmadi to ask such a question of Khalifa-Waqt.

Personally, I thought that such a question did not even warrant a reply, however, Huzoor has nothing to hide and desires for any question or ill-thought, which could potentially weaken the faith of an Ahmadi, be answered.

Thus, despite the personal nature of the question, Huzoor had sent a reply to the Ahmadi answering the question directly.

Mentioning that, Huzoor said:

"I wrote to the Ahmadi that Allah the Almighty has blessed whatever I have through His Grace and Blessings. I have a farm in Pakistan that has proven successful and yields a personal income, as well as some other personal sources. As I have a background in agriculture and farming, I have developed some new agricultural techniques that are used on my

farm and they have produced good results. Though, most of all, it is Allah's Fazl (blessings)."

As I listened, I continued to feel sadness that an Ahmadi had asked about this matter.

I recalled how in a previous Mulaqat, I was amazed when Huzoor mentioned to me that when he travels abroad, he personally pays for the travel expenses of Hazrat Apa Jaan, Huzoor's respected wife.

I remember saying to Huzoor that Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*) had continuous Jamaat duties during Huzoor's travels, meeting Lajna members, attending events and much else.

Huzoor acknowledged that this was true but stated that he did not wish for even a penny of the Jamaat to spent unnecessarily and so he preferred to pay for such travel costs personally.

Very beautifully, Huzoor said that if you are content then even with a small or meagre income, you can manage easily.

Allah's *Jamaat*

During the Mulaqat, I also mentioned to Huzoor some recent comments on social media by the opponents of Ahmadiyyat seeking to malign the Jamaat and Huzoor himself.

In response, Huzoor said:

"I do not say that such things have no effect whatsoever. There will be some people who are affected when they read or see such things. There might even be a few Ahmadis here or there who are weaker in faith who decide to leave the Jamaat. Yet, in the long term nothing can hinder the progress of the Jamaat or cause it permanent harm because we have the support of Allah the Almighty and this is His Jamaat. Our obligation is simply to bow down before Allah and to seek His help at all times and this is my way."

It was very faith inspiring to hear Huzoor's words and his complete trust in Allah the Almighty.

Thereafter, mentioning the forthcoming Jalsa Salana UK, Huzoor said:

"Anyway, at this time, rather than worry about such matters, it is more important that we should pray for the success of the Jalsa Salana. May Allah the Almighty enable the Jalsa to take place safely and to be blessed in all respects."

'Car Park Heroes'

Alhamdulillah, despite the difficult weather conditions, the Jalsa Salana UK 2021 took place from 6 to 8 August and was a means of happiness and spiritual rejuvenation for all the participants, whether on site or those participating virtually from their Mosques, Mission Houses or homes.

This year, *MTA News* sought to do more reports covering the Jalsa both in the build-up and during the event.

One report of particular interest was a short piece about how on-duty Khuddam spent much of the three days physically pushing cars out of the mud. It had been filmed in the evening by Taalay Ahmed from our News team.

At the end of the second day of Jalsa, Taalay was getting a lift with Ibrahim Ikhlaf sahib from Hadeeqatul Mahdi to Country Market where Taalay had parked his own car. However, Ibrahim sahib's car, like countless others, was stuck in the mud and required the helping hand of Khuddam to free it.

As he observed, the spirit with which the Khuddam were serving, Taalay started filming using his mobile phone. A few hours later, he had edited it and published it as a short *MTA News* report, which he titled as *'Car Park Heroes'*.

During his *Friday Sermon* the week after Jalsa on 13 August 2021, Huzoor actually mentioned how people had been very inspired seeing the way the Khuddam were serving on MTA and that it had been an excellent means of Tabligh and Tarbiyyat.

Huzoor said:

"Due to the rain, there was a huge issue in getting all the cars out from the parking area and the volunteers worked in an extraordinary manner

and practically lifted the cars out of the mud… On both the first day and for some part of the second day, there was a huge challenge to get the cars out. This challenge was captured by the camera lens and was shown to the world through MTA."

Huzoor continued:

"In this way, Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis all around the world, who were witnessing these scenes expressed their great astonishment. In fact, upon witnessing this sight, the non-Ahmadis and non-Muslims said that to witness such a scene in this day and age was unbelievable. Whether someone was an officer or a labourer, they were all covered in mud in order to get the cars out of the mud. These are the people who work like jinns and have been granted to the Jamaat of the Promised Messiah (as) by Allah the Almighty."

Filming that segment for *MTA News* was a small example of how Taalay had developed a special quality of finding innovative ways to highlight the blessings of the Jamaat.

Huzoor missing post-Jalsa '*ronak*'

The day after Jalsa, Huzoor called me to Islamabad after Asr and I was able to spend about ninety minutes in his blessed company.

Many Ahmadis who had participated in the Jalsa, either in person, or virtually, had sent their comments or feedback which I presented to Huzoor, as he continued to go through a large file of letters.

I had pages and pages of feedback in which Ahmadis had expressed their feelings of happiness and how the Jalsa had proven a means of spiritual rejuvenation, and so after every few pages, I would ask Huzoor if I should continue and each time, he would indicate that I should.

Once all the comments had been presented, Huzoor asked me what my own recollections of the Jalsa were.

In reply, I said:

"Even though it was held on a much smaller scale it did not feel smaller. It felt like a full Jalsa."

Upon this, Huzoor said:

"Yes, it did not appear smaller. It was only when I looked at the aerial view and compared it with the aerial view of the 2019 Jalsa that the difference in scale was apparent, otherwise, it did not feel much different."

Smiling Huzoor said:

"I think the rain was also a factor that because it was raining people remained inside the marquee, rather than wandering outside and so people were not as spread out as they normally might be."

I asked Huzoor about an incident he had mentioned on the first day of the Jalsa, when he was a guest attending the Jalsa UK and everyone had become drenched whilst offering Namaz.

In response, Huzoor said:

"That was in 1988 when I attended the Jalsa UK as an official representative of Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya Pakistan. I remember that there were heavy puddles of water that had formed inside the marquee and the area where I offered my prayers was flooded. Every part of my body was drenched including my face but for the sake of Allah the Almighty and the Jalsa, one does not feel any difficulty experiencing such conditions."

As the Mulaqat drew to a close, Huzoor said:

"There was one major difference to this Jalsa. Normally, after the Jalsa ends, the Jalsa atmosphere and 'ronak' remains for several weeks and I have meetings with delegations of guests from different countries but this time as soon as I returned to Islamabad there was quietness. This morning, I met Amir Sahib Germany and Dr Nasim Rehmatullah sahib for official meetings but there has been a sense of udaasi (sadness) which

I felt all of a sudden after the Jalsa. It was for this reason that I thought to call you today so that there will be some company and I will talk to you and hear the feedback of Ahmadis."

On the one hand, I felt honoured and privileged that Huzoor had thought to call me but, at the same time, I felt sadness at how Huzoor was missing everyone and the unique Jalsa atmosphere that would normally commence weeks before the Jalsa and continue for several weeks after.

Huzoor's comments were certainly an expression of his great love for the *Jamaat*. I prayed that the Covid risks would reduce so that life could soon return to normal or as close to normal as possible.

Resuming a daily routine

During the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, I had travelled to Islamabad on Fridays or on those days where there were virtual Mulaqats.

On other days, when he had time, Huzoor would graciously call me on the phone. However, throughout the past 18-months, I felt sadness and uneasy. I always felt it was *my* duty to report to Huzoor, rather than for him to phone me.

At the start of the pandemic, Huzoor indicated that the change to my routine would be temporary, however there were times, especially in the last few months, when I thought that perhaps the routine had changed permanently.

However, following the conclusion of the Jalsa Salana, Huzoor permitted me to return daily to Islamabad.

It was a source of immense joy, relief and a great privilege to resume my daily visits to Islamabad for Mulaqat, *Alhamdulillah*.

Huzoor's guidance on Afghanistan

In August, a political and humanitarian crisis developed in Afghanistan, as Western countries led by the United States sought to evacuate their personnel from the country in a matter of days. All the while, the Taliban quickly advanced to the point that it had taken control of the country within days.

I presented updates to Huzoor about the escalating crisis and sought his guidance about the situation, so that we could respond to media inquiries and also present our Jamaat's view to others.

In response, Huzoor said:

"There have been videos showing people desperately trying to flee Afghanistan on planes and some people lost their lives falling as they tried to cling on to the plane. One can only feel extreme regret and sadness at the plight of the innocent people and certainly our sympathies and prayers should be with the innocent people. The Afghani leadership has been corrupt; the USA and other countries have their vested interests, yet it is the average person and their families, who have no role

in the politics, who suffer. So, we should pray that peace and security is restored as quickly as possible."

I asked Huzoor if it was better for the United States and other Western countries to remain in Afghanistan if it meant that the security could be maintained.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

"Now they have made up their minds to leave so it is irrelevant to ask if it is better for them to stay or leave. My view is that the United Nations should step up and urgently send a peacekeeping force to ensure the security and stability of Afghanistan and to make sure it does not become a haven for terrorists and extremists. If the United Nations was strong and just, it would already have acted to ensure that the rights, property and freedoms of the people in Afghanistan were being safeguarded."

I also asked Huzoor if he believed nations and governments should officially recognise the Taliban government.

In reply, Huzoor said:

"If the Taliban exhibits its power cruelly, denies the rights of the Afghani people and is extremist then the world must condemn it in the strongest terms. If they are peaceful and fulfil the rights of their people and if they have majority support in their country then it is a different matter. Each nation is sovereign and it is not for the West or anyone else to choose the Afghani government apart from its own people. However, I have already

received reports of grave cruelties being inflicted by the Taliban and informed that they are seeking to intimidate the people. May Allah the Almighty protect all Ahmadis and other innocent people there."

Excited like a child!

During the school summer holidays, it was my intention to teach my elder son Mahid to ride a bike. I tried for several days to teach him but to our mutual frustration we were not getting anywhere. It was then that I asked Farhad Ahmad, a *Murrabi* serving with me in the *Press & Media Office*, to assist. He had some experience teaching his younger cousins and with his help, Mahid learned to ride his bike within an hour.

In my next Mulaqat, I informed Huzoor of this and also showed a video of Mahid riding successfully in the driveway. *Masha'Allah,* Huzoor was pleased to hear and to see the video.

The next morning, Mahid and I woke up early and I took him out on to a cycle path next to a main road near our house, where he continued to practice riding his bike.

Given Huzoor had taken interest the day before, I took the opportunity to update him of our early morning cycle.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

"You should not have taken him near the main road so quickly! Rather, he should practice for a week or ten days at least in your private

driveway and become more confident before going near the road or other cyclists."

With a smile, Huzoor said:

"It seems you also became excited like a child that after just one day you took him near the main road!"

I nodded knowing that what Huzoor had said was true!

I felt relief and gratitude to Allah that my haste had not led to any misfortune or an accident. I also felt sincere gratitude that, in such personal things, Huzoor guides and expresses his concern.

Taalay's travel

Early morning on 11 August, Taalay Ahmed from our *MTA News* team embarked upon what was scheduled to be a 35-day tour of Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

He was being sent to film and produce a documentary for *MTA News* about the Nusrat Jahan scheme, which launched by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih III (rh), and through which the Jamaat has built many hospitals and schools in Africa.

Taalay's way of producing documentaries was always guided by his devotion to Khilafat. So, whilst we were planning his trip, he kept returning to the fact that he wanted to meet people who had a personal connection to Khilafat.

He wanted to interview people who remembered Huzoor's time living in Ghana and to use the camera lens to shine a light on the services of Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya and of Huzoor personally in helping the underprivileged and raising the standards of health and education in remote areas.

After arriving in Ghana, Taalay spent the next few days, working passionately and dutifully to fulfil the objectives of his trip. He would inform me of various challenges, such as having to contend with rainstorms, yet would also mention how he planned to overcome whatever obstacles came his way.

I was amazed at his positive spirit. He never once queried the standard of his accommodation or mentioned any issues adapting to the local conditions, rather every message he sent or phone call was filled with positivity and a determination to produce the best possible work.

Taalay in Tamale

It so happened that during my Mulaqat, late afternoon on Monday 23 August 2021, Huzoor enquired about Taalay and where he had reached on his travels.

I informed that Taalay had been visiting Tamale, which is the remote village, where Huzoor had lived for some years whilst in Africa.

I mentioned what Taalay had expressed to me after visiting Tamale. I said:

"Taalay was very emotional upon seeing the local conditions in Tamale and the deprivation. On the one hand, he was overwhelmed and joyous that he got to see and experience those places where Huzoor lived and served. Yet, at the same time, he told me that Tamale remained mired in great poverty and the people were living extremely difficult lives. Taalay said he kept thinking and imagining how tough the conditions must have been forty years ago when Huzoor and his family lived there and the conditions they must have endured."

Huzoor did not dwell on this point and rather said:

"الحمدللہ، سب ٹھیک تھا، اللہ کا فضل تھا۔"

That:

"Alhamdulillah, everything was fine, Allah's blessings were with us."

Huzoor was very pleased to hear how Taalay was working and that he was able to see the various places where Huzoor had himself lived and worked.

Indeed, I am sure that Huzoor will have intended to ask Taalay upon his return about the places he saw, especially in Ghana.

I was happy that Huzoor had enquired about Taalay because I knew it would mean a lot to him to know that Huzoor was thinking of him.

Hence, as soon as I came out from Mulaqat, I messaged Taalay to tell him Huzoor had asked how he was and how his visit was going.

A few minutes later, Taalay replied, though I did not check my *WhatsApp* for the next few hours, and so I did not see it until much later.

In reply, Taalay expressed his happiness and gratitude to Allah that Huzoor has asked about him and also mentioned that he had been blessed with the chance to wash his face from a water well used by Huzoor when he lived in Tamale.

Looking back, I feel extremely fortunate and grateful that I was able to convey this message to Taalay on time.

I could have sent the message later in the evening or the next day but thankfully it reached him and he was able to know that Huzoor was remembering him and happy with him.

A night of grief

I returned home that evening and settled into a normal evening routine when, just after 10pm, I received a call from Umar Safir sahib (*Director MTA Africa*), with whom Taalay and I had been liaising, both before and during his journey.

What followed next – during that call and then throughout the rest of the night - is hard to explain.

Normally, it is through writing that I am able to best express my emotions and feelings, yet it is impossible for me to detail or describe those next few hours. Save to say, it was the worst and most difficult few hours I have experienced.

Where it was a night of unbearable grief, it also foreshadowed a period of time where I experienced the unique blessings of Khilafat, as well as the love, support and strength of unity in our *Jamaat* perhaps as never before.

Initially, Umar sahib said there had been an incident in Ghana but he reassured me that everything was ok. From what he said initially, it occurred to me that Taalay had been involved in a car accident.

Continuing, Umar sahib said:

"What I am going to tell you next is shocking - it was not a car accident but actually there were some armed robbers and Taalay was shot."

That moment and those words remain etched in my mind. I could not comprehend what I had heard. It seemed to defy belief. I felt a surge of pain and desperation. I kept thinking of how Taalay was alone, thousands of miles from his family. I was panicked and confused.

Details were extremely sketchy and even though I was being told that Taalay was stable, I felt extreme anxiety. I did not know if he was getting proper treatment or whether they were still under threat.

As soon as I got off the phone with Umar sahib, I called Sahibzada Mirza Waqas Ahmad sahib (*Waqas bhai*), son of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba), and informed him and asked him to inform Huzoor immediately and to seek his prayers.

I also immediately sent a message directly to Huzoor seeking his prayers and guidance about whether to inform Taalay's family.

For the next couple of hours, I tried to gather as much information as possible from Ghana Jamaat and the local MTA team. I was informed by Amir Sahib Ghana and others that they believed Taalay was stable, however they were all relying on second-hand information.

There was a general state of confusion, whereby initially I was told Taalay had been shot in his arm but later it was confirmed that he had actually been shot in the back.

One thing I was clearly told was that there was a need to transfer Taalay from the local clinic to the Tamale General Hospital and arrangements were being made for this. The fact that he needed treatment at a larger hospital was itself worrying, as it suggested that he had sustained significant injuries.

Shortly after finding out, I called Taalay's father, Syed Hashim Ahmad (bhai Hashim) to inform him of what had happened.

He told me how that morning, whilst walking to or from the Mosque, suddenly he had felt something in his heart which made him pray specially for Taalay.

He said he would drive overnight to my house from Hartlepool and then we would go to inform Taalay's wife Satwat in London and my sister Gugu, Taalay's mother, who was in Bordon. We were hoping and praying that by then we would have good news and confirmation that Taalay was well.

Though it was extremely late, Huzoor continued to enquire several times over the next few hours about Taalay.

It was impossible to sleep and so my wife and I just kept praying for some confirmation that Taalay was ok and that he had reached the larger hospital safely.

From about 12.30am, I did not receive any further updates for a couple of hours. I hoped that *'no news'* meant *'good news'*.

Then, just after 2.30am, my phone rang and I saw that it was Aleem Mehmood sahib, a Missionary in Ghana who was calling. As I picked up, I could feel myself trembling and there was a sense of deep foreboding.

As soon as I answered, I heard Aleem sahib on the other end in tears and in a state of anguish. I asked what had happened and, to my utter devastation and shock, he replied that those treating Taalay could not control the bleeding and he had passed away on the way to Tamale General Hospital. *Inna lillahe wa inna illaihe rajeoon.*

I tried to ask details but my head was spinning. I could not comprehend what he had said. It seemed so unreal. Taalay was so healthy, happy, young and vibrant.

As soon as the call ended, I called Waqas bhai and informed him. He was stunned and devastated. I asked him to inform Huzoor as soon as he could.

However, even before he could do so, I received a message directly from Huzoor asking for an update on Taalay.

At that moment, I had no idea what to say or how I should respond.

All I could bring myself to type was:

'Inna lillahey wa inna illehey rajeoon'.

After composing myself, I informed Huzoor that I just received the news that Taalay had passed and beseeched him for his prayers.

Throughout the night and the next morning, I received messages from Huzoor filled with prayers, reassurance, comfort and instructions.

I do not know if and when Huzoor slept at all that night.

Throughout, Huzoor's personal grief and love for Taalay was evident.

Huzoor said:

"(طالع) ایک ہیرا تھا جس کو اللہ تعالیٰ نے اپنے پاس بلا لیا ہے۔ اللہ تعالیٰ سطوت کو بھی صبر اور حوصلہ عطا فرمائے اور بچوں کی بھی حفاظت فرمائے۔ گگو، ہاشم کو بھی صدمہ برداشت کرنے کی توفیق عطا فرمائے۔ آمین۔"

That:

"He (Taalay) was a diamond who Allah the Almighty has called back to Himself. May Allah the Almighty grant Satwat patience and courage and keep the children in His protection. May He also grant Gugu and Hashim the strength to bear this tragedy. Ameen."

The next few hours were, without a shadow of doubt, some of the most difficult and anguish-filled moments of my life. Taalay's wife and his mother were not aware of what happened and his father only knew that he had been injured.

So, the next few hours, were spent trying to ensure that the news did not leak from anyone in Ghana or the few *Jamaat* officials who had been informed here in the UK overnight.

I paced back and forth in my home trying to think of how we would inform Satwat and Taalay's parents.

I kept thinking of how Satwat was the daughter of Sahibzada Mirza Ghulam Qadir sahib and was a small child when her father had been martyred and now, as a young lady, with two very small children, her husband had been martyred.

As I considered all of these things, I found it difficult to breathe. I lay down but felt even more restless and so stood and started pacing again.

My wife tried her best to comfort and support me but we were both numb with shock and disbelief.

Waqas bhai spoke with me several times during the night and he tried his best to reassure me, even though he himself was also in a state of shock.

In those moments of panic and desperation, I turned to Allah and bowed down before Him and I also kept seeking the prayers of Huzoor.

Alhamdulillah, with each prayer and each word from Huzoor, I began to steady myself and readied myself to inform bhai Hashim who was due to arrive at my home around 6am.

In those emotional moments, I also expressed to Huzoor my personal grief that, as Taalay's uncle and as the person who was supervising his Jamaat work, I had not fulfilled my duties to him and had not protected him as I ought to have.

In reply, Huzoor reassured and comforted me and stated that Allah the Almighty desired to give Taalay the status as a martyr and so I should not feel any guilt in this regard.

I swear by Allah, these words of Huzoor were like a miracle tonic for me and it felt as though a heavy weight had been lifted from my chest.

I mention those moments simply to testify to the fact that, at our lowest possible moments, we Ahmadis, are held up by Khilafat and the prayers of the Khalifa-Waqt.

Informing the family

Just after 6am, bhai Hashim arrived and upon entering, he immediately asked what the latest update was.

Before saying anything, I asked him to sit down and the look on his face indicated that he had understood what I was about to tell him.

Prior to his arrival, I kept thinking what words to use and how to break the news that his son had lost his life in such a brutal and violent way. Never could I have imagined having to tell anyone's father such news.

I can't recall how I actually broke the news to him but I vividly recall his reaction.

With the Grace of Allah, the patience of bhai Hashim was exemplary. He took a sip or two of water and remained composed throughout. Thereafter, he informed that he would go and tell my sister Gugu. Then, we would tell Satwat.

Over the next few minutes, I informed my brother Fareed and my sister Nabbo. They too were shocked and grief-stricken. Taalay was a source of joy for all of our family.

Some of us, and I certainly count myself in this, are weak in maintaining regular contact with our relatives. However, Taalay was an exception. He kept contact with all of his family members and made a special effort in this regard.

My sister Gugu called me as soon as bhai Hashim had informed her. She was extremely close to Taalay and they always appeared like the best of friends, rather than son and daughter. Yet, somehow and to my amazement, she was in complete control of her emotions. She just kept saying how proud she was of Taalay that he had been serving the Jamaat and given his life in this cause.

We met at Taalay's home and bhai Hashim and my sister Gugu informed Satwat. *Masha'Allah*, on that day, and ever since, she has shown exemplary courage, patience and trust in Allah. May Allah the Almighty be with her always and give her continued strength and patience. *Ameen.*

The blessings of the *Jamaat*

A few minutes after Satwat was informed, bhai Hashim informed some close family members in Pakistan.

Within moments, my phone and those of other family members started to ring non-stop, whilst family members and other Jamaat members started to arrive at Taalay's home.

As others became aware, though the grief was raw and tremendous, I felt a degree of relief that the burden of informing Taalay's immediately family had now passed and the support network of our family and the wider Jamaat was immediate and immense.

Huzoor had sent me a message telling me not to drive, knowing that I had not slept that night and was not in any frame of mind to drive.

Thus, Sadr Khuddam arranged for a car to drive me and my family on that day and, in the days that followed, Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyya helped and supported in various ways.

Furthermore, the *Markazi* (central) administration, *the UK Jamaat, Lajna Imaillah* and *Majlis Ansarullah* all provided a great deal of assistance throughout for which we will always be grateful.

As the day progressed, more and more people came to offer their condolences. Everyone was shocked and subdued. The staff members and volunteers of MTA International were particularly affected and devastated.

Everyone shared their stories of Taalay and as I listened, I began to see how they shined a light on aspects of Taalay's excellent character that I was not aware of.

Huzoor's visit to Taalay's home

As the morning progressed into the afternoon, Waqas bhai informed me that there was a chance that Huzoor would visit in the afternoon and a little later we received confirmation that Huzoor was on his way, along with Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*).

It is a strange phenomenon that, even at that time of grief and sadness, as soon as I heard that Huzoor was coming there was a sense of happiness and joy in my heart. I was glad that my children would have the chance to cast a glance upon Huzoor for the first time during the pandemic.

Upon arriving in late afternoon, Huzoor entered Taalay and Satwat's home and met the close family members before taking a seat in the lounge.

Throughout his visit, I observed as Huzoor spoke in very loving terms about Taalay and spoke of how he was infused with absolute devotion and love for Khilafat.

Huzoor mentioned how when he had been informed of the attack on Taalay, initially it was reported that Taalay had been shot in the arm but later when it was confirmed he had been shot in the back, Huzoor realised immediately that the situation was very serious and critical.

Whilst there, Huzoor listened tenderly as Taalay's parents talked about their son and without doubt the emotional healing and grieving process started during those moments.

Huzoor's presence, his love and compassion were transforming feelings of intense fear and desperation into feelings of peace before our eyes.

The next few days passed by in a blur. There were moments of deep grief followed by moments of joy as we remembered Taalay and these fluctuating emotions continued for some time.

We were anxious for Taalay's body to return safely and as quickly as possible, but the legal formalities in Ghana had to be completed first.

An emotional few moments

Over the next few days, I split my time between Islamabad and the Masjid Fazl area where Taalay lived and where people continued to visit to offer condolences.

The day after Taalay's martyrdom, on Tuesday 25 August, I reported for Mulaqat after Asr and Huzoor asked me how I was and if I had managed to get some sleep, as he knew that I had not slept at all on the night of Taalay's martyrdom. I mentioned I had slept for a few hours and was rested.

All day there had been something I deeply desired to say to Huzoor, though I feared I would be overcome with emotion. Nevertheless, I felt an obligation to say it.

So as soon as the opportunity arose, I said:

"Huzoor, there is no doubt that the night of Taalay's passing was the most difficult night of my life. During that night, Mala and Waqas bhai both gave me support but it was you and your prayers that saved me, otherwise I do not think I would have been able to survive that night."

As I feared, I could not control my emotions, and I think for the first time in my life, I completely broke down in front of Huzoor.

All this time, Huzoor did not say a word but waited for me to compose myself. I was determined to finish what I desired to say.

As I tried to control my tears, I said:

"Huzoor, every moment for the rest of my life I will remain so grateful to you for the way you cared for me yesterday and the way you saved me and gave me the strength to stand when I was broken."

Though I felt embarrassed at having broken down, I felt a sense of relief that I had been able to express, at least to some extent, the feelings of my heart to Huzoor.

Taalay's poem

After that, I shared with Huzoor a poem that Taalay had written some years before expressing his love for Khilafat.

In the days that followed this poem was published and read widely but, upon writing it, Taalay had shared it only with his friend Farhad.

Huzoor took the paper and carefully read the poem.

In the poem, Taalay expressed his love for Huzoor but also wrote how his love was concealed and a secret of his heart.

Indeed, the last line of Taalay's poem was as follows:

"I love my Caliph, but he'll never know."

After reading it, Huzoor looked up and said:

"اب تو پتہ چل گیا ہے!"

That:

"Now I know."

Then, with great affection for Taalay evident, Huzoor said:

"ویسے مجھے تو پہلے سے ہی پتہ تھا کہ طالع کو کتنی محبت ہے خلافت سے۔"

That:

"Actually, I knew even before how much love Taalay had for Khilafat."

<u>'I love my family and I love Huzoor'</u>

Upon this, I mentioned to Huzoor how one of the members of the MTA Ghana team, who was with Taalay at the hospital, had informed that after being attacked, Taalay had expressed his love for his family and his love for Huzoor.

Indeed, he reported that Taalay's final words were:

"I love my family and I love Huzoor."

So, the very final words he spoke, were a proclamation of his love for Khilafat.

As I said this, Huzoor did not say anything but I could see and sense that Huzoor was moved by Taalay's sentiments of love.

A part of history

I mentioned to Huzoor that there had been outpouring of tributes and emotional messages posted on social media by Ahmadis around the world.

I said that, of those I had seen, one written by a young Waqf-e-Zindighi in Ghana, Fowad Ahmed, who had been assisting Taalay during his visit, had particularly touched me.

Especially, the last part, where Fowad had written:

"He (Taalay) travelled to Ghana to produce a historic documentary. However, little did he know he was here to become part of History."

After I narrated it, Huzoor acknowledged and appreciated this comment.

I mentioned to Huzoor various qualities I had observed in Taalay.

One thing I had always seen and felt was he felt a sense of pride and duty at being a member of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) but it was not something he was ever arrogant about.

In fact, several people had told me they were not aware that Taalay was related to Huzoor until after his passing.

Upon this, Huzoor said:

"Yes, even Amir Sahib Ghana did not know who Taalay was. When he met me after the Jalsa UK, I mentioned to him that Taalay was travelling to Ghana and he had no idea that he was my relative. So I actually gave his introduction to Amir sahib and told him his family background."

Huzoor enquired about Taalay's family.

I mentioned that they were coping and how earlier that day we had been laughing as we remembered some of Taalay's light and funny stories, including one which Taalay had himself narrated during a virtual talk he gave to the UK Atfal Rally.

I said:

"One thing we remembered was how a couple of years ago, Taalay wrote to Huzoor to say he had a 'health' and a 'financial' issue. Upon this, he received a message that Huzoor had called him for a Mulaqat immediately. When he got this message, Taalay called me and said that he had not written the details in the letter because he did not wish to waste Huzoor's time. He then explained that the 'health' issue was that he had been kicked in the leg whilst playing football and it hurt a bit and the 'financial' issue was that he had received a small parking fine!"

I could see Huzoor smiling and so I continued to narrate. I said:

"Taalay was somewhat stressed and said that Huzoor has shown such concern for me and called me for an urgent Mulaqat, yet these are both such minor issues! What should I do now? Should I go for the Mulaqat because I don't wish to waste Huzoor's time. Or should I write another letter clarifying the issues? I advised him that because Huzoor had called him he should report for Mulaqat no matter what."

I continued:

"I was eager to hear how the Mulaqat went and so afterwards I phoned Taalay and he told me that Huzoor had been extremely gracious. He said Huzoor had immediately enquired if Taalay needed some financial assistance or a loan and it was then he admitted that the fine was only a few pounds! Huzoor then enquired about his health and he disclosed that it had been an insignificant football injury from which he had now fully recovered from!"

After I had asked if Huzoor had said anything further, Taalay replied:

"Yes, Huzoor said that even though it is good that I keep my letters short, I should put a little more detail in them in future!"

As I reminded Huzoor of this comment, we both laughed.

It was a light incident but it was a reflection also of Taalay's character.

He was straightforward and fully obedient to Khilafat, and so once he had heard in a Waqf-e-Nau class or from somewhere else that Huzoor had advised people to write shorter letters, he did not ask anything further and ensured his letters were extremely short and to the point, until he received that directive from Huzoor to add some basic details.

The *'Moon of the Prophets'*

After a few minutes, Huzoor mentioned a documentary that Taalay had directed and produced entitled *'Moon of the Prophets'*, about Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad (ra). I had submitted the documentary to Huzoor for approval and Huzoor had said he would review it when he had the opportunity.

Now, Huzoor handed me the DVD and instructed to place it in the DVD player in his office.

Over the next one hour, Huzoor reviewed the documentary, all the while continuing to check the file of letters placed in front of him. It was very emotional to watch the documentary in Huzoor's company and to hear Taalay's narration linking one part of the documentary, which was about his great-grandfather, with the next.

There were some historic photos included that Taalay had used, some of which I had not seen before.

On three or four occasions, Huzoor informed me that the photos used had originally been taken by his own father, Hazrat Sahibzada Mirza Mansoor Ahmad sahib (rh).

Huzoor would inform who the people in each photo were and if I did not recognise a particular name, Huzoor would explain who they were and their family background.

In one segment, the documentary covered the demise of Hazrat Mirza Sharif Ahmad (ra), Huzoor's paternal grandfather.

It was narrated that it was the duty of Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad (ra) to convey this very sad news to Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra).

Upon seeing that part, Huzoor said:

"I was a young boy at that time 10 or 11 and when Abba Jan died (Hazrat Mirza Sharif Ahmad), I was actually the one who was told to go and inform Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad (ra). So, I told him and he then informed Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra)."

Certainly, it was very interesting, and indeed poignant, to hear how Huzoor, who was just a young boy at the time, had been given the duty to inform Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad (ra) of his grandfather's passing.

As the documentary ended, I said:

"Taalay told me that he did not consider this documentary to be his best because the last few had been about Huzoor himself. Even though, this documentary has some very interesting incidents, I too shared the same opinion as Taalay. However, now this documentary will play on MTA

after Taalay's martyrdom and I think because of that fact, it will have a deep effect on the viewers, Insh'Allah."

Upon this, Huzoor said ***'Haan'*** meaning ***'Yes'***.

Dealings with the coroner

With the Grace of Allah, Taalay's body arrived safely on 1 September 2021 and was taken to the *HFS Funeral Home* in Epsom.

It was both emotional and a relief for everyone that Taalay was back and Huzoor very graciously instructed he would lead his *Janaza* prayer at Islamabad after the *Friday Sermon* on 3 September.

Further, despite the fact that Covid restrictions remained in force at Islamabad, Huzoor permitted for hundreds of people to attend, including all of Taalay's family and his *MTA* and *Press & Media Office* colleagues.

On Thursday, the day before the *Janaza*, there remained some legal complexities about whether the local coroner would give approval for Taalay's body to be buried the next day.

In such cases, where there has not been a natural death, a post-mortem is mandatory. The UK Jamaat was initially hopeful that this requirement would be waived but we were informed on the Thursday that such a waiver was not possible.

Normally, a post-mortem has to be booked in several days in advance and so it would mean a delay of at least a week. It had already been a week and a half since Taalay had passed away and so everyone desired that Taalay's *Janaza* and burial take place on the Friday.

Thus, in Mulaqat on Thursday afternoon, I informed Huzoor of the issue and the potential delay and specially requested his prayers.

Alhamdulillah, the blessings and acceptance of Huzoor's prayers were manifest immediately, as when I left the Mulaqat, Dr Muzaffar Ahmad sahib, who was dealing with the coroner on behalf of the UK Jamaat, informed that the coroner had agreed to expedite the process.

The post-mortem would take place first thing on Friday morning and rather than wait for the formal report, the coroner would sign-off on the burial order as soon as the post-mortem took place.

With the *Grace of Allah*, everything proceeded the next morning like clockwork and all of the formalities were done in good time. Taalay's body was escorted from London to Islamabad in a large convoy of over 20 cars.

As I sat in one of the cars, I thought of how Allah had arranged everything so perfectly and with great honour for Taalay and his family. I could not help but ponder over the blessings of the Jamaat.

Taalay – truly a fortunate one

I am sure most, if not all, of those reading this will have listened to Huzoor's Friday Sermon that day in which he paid tribute to Taalay and testified to his character.

It is therefore not necessary for me to detail it, save to say that the way Huzoor spoke about Taalay was incredible.

Of course, I had expected that Huzoor would speak in loving and affectionate terms about Taalay, yet the way Huzoor addressed Taalay personally throughout and testified to his character was something that will be recorded in history.

As per the meaning of his name, Taalay departed this world as a truly fortunate one.

In his sermon, Huzoor said:

"He (Taalay) was a diamond which has now departed from us…This loss is so profound that it has shaken us. This beautiful person understood the spirit of devotion and truly fulfilled the oath he had made… That dear one understood the spirit of Waqf and truly fulfilled that oath which he had taken. Seeing him left me astonished and I remain so, at how, despite being a child who was raised in this worldly environment, he understood the essence and spirit of his Waqf and then fulfilled it to the highest possible degree. Having attained martyrdom, he proved that he truly was a sincere helper of Khilafat… O dear Taalay! I testify to the fact that you

have most certainly attained the highest standards of fulfilling your Waqf and the pledge that you had taken."

Janaza prayer and burial

After the *Jummah* prayers, Huzoor stepped outside the Mosque and led Taalay's *Janaza*. Before doing so, Huzoor placed the ring of the Promised Messiah (as) on the top of the casket for several moments and prayed.

After the *Janaza* prayer, Huzoor enquired from Amir Sahib UK the time of the burial, which was to take place at Eashing cemetery in Godalming. To my surprise, Huzoor informed that he would attend the burial.

I had not imagined that Huzoor would have the time to attend and we were all overwhelmed by Huzoor's kindness.

We soon made our way to the cemetery and a few minutes later, Huzoor arrived. As the coffin was moved towards the grave site, Huzoor himself stood at the front of the coffin and supported it with his hand.

Huzoor was the first to shovel some soil onto the coffin and Huzoor also placed a plaque identifying whose grave it was and led a silent prayer.

As I witnessed all of this, I remember thinking how Taalay was being granted the most wonderful and honourable departure from this world. *Alhamdulilah.*

My **role model**

After Taalay's death, one of Taalay's close friends informed me that Taalay had told him about being elected *'Head Boy'* at his secondary school and 6th form College.

Taalay had told him that it was his desire to become Head Boy because a few years before, I had been the Head Boy at the same secondary school and same 6th Form College.

Taalay had actually said that, whilst he had been able to emulate me in terms of being 'Head Boy', he did not believe that he could ever emulate me in later life. I suppose he meant it in the sense that I had been blessed to serve Khilafat to some small degree over these past years.

Certainly, during his life, I knew that Taalay considered me, in some respects, as a role model to him. Yet, in his passing, Taalay has become a role model for me and for so many others.

When I guide my children, I will not tell them to be like me but will tell them to strive to be like their cousin, who was brave and utterly devoted to Khilafat and the service of Islam until his very last breath.

In the documentary that aired a day later, *A Diamond of Khilafat*, I mentioned a sense of regret that I had occasionally been too harsh with Taalay. Even a few days before the UK Jalsa, I had spoken to him harshly over a work matter. Yet, the beauty of Taalay's character was such that he never held a grudge or

let any ill-will linger and so within a day or two he messaged and called me as though nothing had been said.

Every day, at some point or other, I think about Taalay and though sadness and grief remains, I feel so proud of him and am reassured that he will be in the best of places in the *Hereafter*, Insha'Allah.

Precious moments with Huzoor

After Taalay's burial, I returned to Islamabad. I had not had the time to prepare any notes for Mulaqat and so I planned to quickly go and prepare some notes and then report for Mulaqat with something to present, even if it meant I was a few minutes late. However, just as I arrived at Islamabad, I received a call from Private Secretary sahib asking if I was on site and, if so, I should come for Mulaqat.

As soon as I reached the PS Office, Munir Javed sahib informed Huzoor that I had arrived and Huzoor called me into his office.

As I entered, Huzoor said:

"I was not sure if you would come today, as I thought you would still be at the cemetery."

In reply, I said:

"Huzoor, I do not have any notes or report today and I have come only to say Jazak'Allah to you."

Smiling Huzoor said:

"جزاک اللہ کس بات کا؟"

That:

"What are you saying Jazak'Allah for?"

In response, I said:

"Jazak'Allah for everything! For the love you have shown us today and the past days. The way Huzoor spoke about Taalay and the fact that Huzoor came for the burial, which was completely beyond our hopes and expectations. Today, whilst at the cemetery, I saw my sister and my brother-in-law (Taalay's parents) smiling and joyous and our family were receiving mubarakbaad rather than condolences."

Though, I had nothing official with me, Huzoor indicated to me to sit down and for the next hour, I was able to spend time with Huzoor, as he did his work.

Huzoor himself seemed content that everything had proceeded well.

I mentioned several aspects of Huzoor's sermon about Taalay and, once more, I saw how Huzoor carefully pays attention and regards to the feelings of those who are suffering.

Thus, Huzoor mentioned Taalay's siblings.

Huzoor said:

"It was my desire to mention at least some parts of the letters sent by all of Taalay's immediate family, however it was not possible to mention Adil's letter and I hope he will not mind. Also, I mentioned Nudrat by name but Nooresahar I did not and I hope she will not mind this."

Thereafter, speaking about another part of his sermon, Huzoor said:

"In the Sermon, there was a clear message for the members of the family of the Promised Messiah (as) – that being a relative by blood of a righteous person does not give a person any status or reason to be proud and that it was up to the members of the Promised Messiah's (as) family to live up to his expectations and to do justice to being related to him."

Huzoor then asked:

"What is your opinion, do you think they will heed my message?"

In reply, I said:

"Huzoor, Insha'Allah it will certainly have a positive effect and Huzoor's words were very much needed."

Upon this, Huzoor said:

"May Allah make it so that it has a positive and righteous effect and be a means of guidance for the family members of the Promised Messiah (as)."

Huzoor continued:

"Also, within the Sermon was a message for all of the Missionaries and Waqf-e-Zindighis serving in the Jamaat as well. I gave the example of how Taalay took any instructions of the Khalifa as an instruction for himself, even if it was not directed at him personally. This is the standard that all Missionaries and Waqf-e-Zindighis should emulate."

I mentioned to Huzoor that at the burial, at one point, Huzoor affectionately took the arm of bhai Hashim, Taalay's father, and narrated a poetic couplet.

Huzoor said:

"Did you hear?"

In reply, I said:

"Ji Huzoor, however, I did not understand."

Upon this, Huzoor informed it was a verse of a famous poet.

Repeating the couplet, Huzoor said:

زندگی انساں کی ہے مانندِ
مرغِ خوش نوا

شاخ پر بیٹھا، کوئی دم
چہچہایا، اُڑ گیا

Though I understood a little, Huzoor could see that I remained ignorant to the full meaning of the couplet.

Thus, explaining it, Huzoor said:

"This couplet means that one's life passes by in the blink of an eye just like that bird who sings in the most melodious of ways perched upon the branch of a tree one day but who is gone the next."

Opening his heart before Allah alone

Mentioning the sermon again, Huzoor said:

"There were a couple of moments where I had to control my own emotions and almost faltered but I managed to remain composed. I don't know if you noticed but Mansoor (Huzoor's grandson) noticed."

In reply, I said that there was one point where I had noticed but, even at that point, within a second, Huzoor's voice and demeanour was once again fully composed.

What Huzoor said next was incredibly moving and testified not only to Huzoor's love for Taalay but, beyond that, his everlasting bond of love with Allah the Almighty.

Huzoor said:

"I had already opened my heart and let out my emotions (about Taalay) prior to the Sermon before Allah and this is always my way."

I thought of all the times of grief and sadness that Huzoor has had to endure during his life both prior to Khilafat and after. And yet, the world never sees it. Only Allah the Almighty knows. This, as Huzoor said, is always his way.

In fact, Huzoor's trust in Allah and his bond with him is such that he never considers any trial or grief as a form of suffering.

A few days later, during a virtual Mulaqat with Nasirat, Huzoor was asked to narrate a hardship that he had faced in his life.

In reply, Huzoor said:

"If I say I faced any hardship, that means I did not understand the spirit of my Waqf. So I cannot mention. I never faced any hardship. I always saw Allah's Fazl (blessings) on me."

Later that day, when I had Mulaqat, I said:

"Huzoor, even now, after so many years having the chance to serve with you, each Mulaqat I see a new aspect of Huzoor's humility and patience. Today, you said that you had never faced any hardship, even though, if a person looks objectively, then both before your Khilafat and after Khilafat you have faced many hardships. You lived in very remote parts of Africa, you were arrested on false charges in Pakistan, during your Khilafat there have been times of grief and you have the weight of the world on your shoulders and yet you say that you have never faced hardship."

Huzoor smiled and then repeated what he had said in the class earlier in the day.

Huzoor said:

"میں نے تو اللہ کے فضل ہی دیکھے ہیں"

That:

"I have only seen Allah's blessings."

Thereafter, after glancing at his watch, Huzoor said:

"Today, I kept you here with me for an hour and listened to your comments so that I could have some company whilst I worked. Now, you should go as your family will be waiting for you."

These words of Huzoor were extremely moving and triggered a surge of emotion in my heart.

I knew Huzoor did not need or desire *my* company or presence, rather he knew that I needed *him*.

2 poems

On Monday 6 September, I received two poems from Huzoor as PDFs.

I received the first one, entitled ***'Taalay Shaheed Apnay Mehboob Aqa say Mukhaatib'*** in the afternoon, whilst the second one entitled ***'Mehboob Aqa apnay pyaray Taalay say'*** late at night.

I have little knowledge of poetry, especially Urdu poetry, but I felt a surge of emotion reading both poems.

The one written on behalf of Taalay testified to his life's work and purpose. It shined a light on who he was and expressed vividly what was in his heart.

The second one, written on behalf of Huzoor, was even more emotional and, though it had been written by someone else, it seemed to perfectly reflect Huzoor's own feelings and life experiences.

I shared the poems with Taalay's immediate family and they were all curious to know *who* had written them. Huzoor had not mentioned the author to me

and I did not deem it appropriate to ask. Though, I had a strong suspicion of who may have written them.

The next day, I reported for Mulaqat and, after presenting my daily report, Huzoor mentioned the two poems.

Huzoor said:

"The one written on my behalf was written later but if you read it first and then read the one on behalf of Taalay it has greater impact."

Huzoor then instructed I open the *PDFs* with the poems on my phone and, Huzoor took the phone and started to read the poem written on his behalf.

After each line or couplet, Huzoor would make sure I understood and, where I did not, he explained the meaning.

Over the next ten minutes, Huzoor read out loud each couplet of both poems and, where I felt myself becoming very emotional, I also felt and could see that the words of the poem had a deep and visible effect upon Huzoor.

After reading the poems, Huzoor said:

"These poems capture the feelings and emotions of both sides. There is no exaggeration in either of these poems. For example, it mentions how whilst in Ghana there were times of hunger that we endured and this is true. However, at those times Allah always provided for us and fulfilled our needs."

Huzoor continued:

"Whenever we had guests or people visited we were able to look after them and feed them well. I remember once we suddenly found out that some family guests would be visiting us and there was only a little amount of aloo tarkari (a very simple potato curry) in the home that would not suffice for the guests. There was nothing else and I had no money whatsoever to buy anything. Yet, suddenly and completely unexpectedly, Allah fulfilled our need. The guest himself wanted to give me some local money, as he wanted some dollars in return at a later date. Thus, he gave me the local currency in cash and I wrote him a post-dated cheque to return his money at a later date. With that, I was able to go and buy some food for our guests. This is how Allah always provided for us."

As I stood up to leave Huzoor's office, he smiled and said:

"پھر پتہ لگا کس نے یہ دونوں نظمیں لکھیں؟"

That:

"So did you find out who wrote these Nazms?"

I said:

"Huzoor, I do not know but I have a guess."

Huzoor said:

"Kon?" as in ***"Who?"***

In reply, I said:

"I think they were written by Asif Basit sahib."

Huzoor smiled and said:

"Yes, you are right. He wrote them."

Thereafter, Huzoor said:

"Yesterday, Asif sahib sent me the first poem on behalf of Taalay and I said to him that it is very good but there should also be a poem written on my behalf. Asif sahib was concerned that to write poetry a certain atmosphere and emotional state is required and so he requested I pray that he develops the necessary state again. So, I prayed and then just a little while later, last night, he sent me the second poem and, Masha'Allah, it was even better than the first one."

As the *Mulaqat* ended, Huzoor told me that I should not report for Mulaqat at Islamabad the next day, rather he planned to visit Taalay's family and I should come there and bring my family as well.

I was extremely touched that Huzoor was planning to visit Taalay's family again and felt very fortunate that Huzoor had said that I should also come

with my family. I looked forward very much to what I hoped would prove a very blessed and joyous day.

Preparing for Huzoor's visit

After dropping our sons to school, my wife Mala and I went to the Fazl Mosque the next morning. Though I thought it more likely that Huzoor would visit in the late afternoon or early evening, Huzoor had not specified a time and so we went early just in case Huzoor's plan was to visit earlier.

The next few hours were spent in preparation of Huzoor's visit.

Mala and Huzoor's niece, Nakasha Ahmad, who had come from the United States to attend the funeral, made preparations in the Guest House opposite the Fazl Mosque known as '*41*'.

I took on the duty of bringing some food items that could be served to Huzoor. I drove to Putney High Street and picked up those things that I thought Huzoor may like, based on what I had observed during the past few years, especially during Huzoor's tours.

An hour or two later, I returned to Fazl Mosque with some *sushi, French macarons*, a *cheesecake* and a few other items.

In the afternoon, I picked up Mahid and Moshahid from school and Taalay's parents and siblings also arrived and we all waited with great anticipation for Huzoor's arrival.

A blessed visit

Alhamdulillah, just after 6.30pm, Huzoor and Khala Saboohi (*Huzoor's respected wife*) arrived and entered the 41 guest house.

This visit was very different to the one that took place on the day of Taalay's martyrdom. That was altogether much more sombre, whereas now, as quite a few days had passed, the atmosphere was much more positive. We were all feeling extremely blessed to be in Huzoor's presence.

Throughout his visit, Huzoor showed so much love and affection for all of Taalay's family members but most especially his children Talal and Zainab. It was truly incredible and extremely moving to see how Huzoor showered these young, innocent children with his love and prayers, *Alhamdulillah*.

Shortly after arriving, Huzoor told me to bring a bag from his car. The bag was filled with boxes of chocolates.

First, Huzoor gave chocolates to Taalay's children and to Hameed, Taalay's younger brother.

With the Grace of Allah, Huzoor also gave a box of Ghanaian chocolate to Mahid for him and Moshahid to share.

During his visit, Huzoor spoke with great kindness and tenderness to Taalay's family. He mentioned Asif Basit sahib's poem and informed them how he had instructed Asif sahib to write the poem on his behalf.

Huzoor expressed affectionate and gracious comments about Taalay, which were a means of comfort to all of his family.

Before Huzoor's arrival, Nakasha baji and I had decided we would mutually share the duty of serving. So, initially, we took forward some water but Huzoor said there was no need for us to bring anything. We asked if we should bring tea but again Huzoor said not to.

A few minutes later, we tried again and placed some *macarons* in front of Huzoor, however Huzoor said to place them back on the dining table and that the children should eat them.

All the while, I was looking for the *sushi* so I could perhaps try one last time to offer something to Huzoor but I could not find it anywhere. Later Mala and Nakasha baji informed that they had forgotten to take it out of the fridge.

A few minutes later, prior to departing, Huzoor walked past the dining table where the food was laid out and to my absolute delight, Huzoor very informally picked up a *strawberry macaron* and ate it there and then.

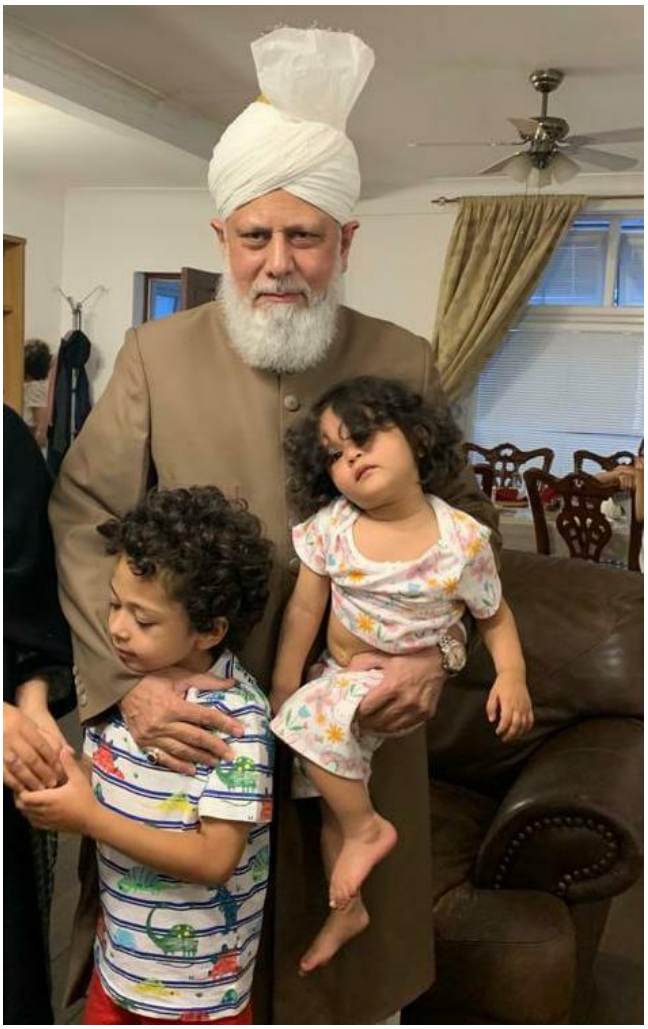
After eating it, Huzoor looked at me and said:

"I did not intend to eat anything but when I saw the macaron on the table, I could not help but be tempted!"

I felt a surge of happiness that Huzoor had liked it and enjoyed it, *Alhamdulillah.*

From a personal family point of view, it was very joyous to witness Mala and our three children have the chance to meet Huzoor for the first time during the pandemic. Our daughter, Jaweria, had been born at the start of pandemic and so it was our very first opportunity to introduce her to Huzoor and for her to seek the blessings of Khilafat directly. Further, Huzoor told Mala that she should tell me to write to request a family Mulaqat in Islamabad.

Before leaving, Huzoor permitted for Taalay's family to have photos with him and a few days later, Huzoor had the photos printed and he signed them and sent them as a gift for them.



Alhamdulillah, the way Huzoor exhibited his love and kindness once again was a means of healing and joy. Huzoor's love, benevolence and compassion truly is incomparable.

I thought of Taalay and how happy he would have been to know of the love Huzoor had shown to his wife and children and other family members.

May Allah the Almighty continually elevate his status and grant patience to his wife and parents and may He ever protect and bless Talal and Zainab, Taalay's young children. *Ameen.*

A relentless schedule

With the Grace of Allah, the work of Khalifa-Waqt always continues and Huzoor never wastes even a single moment.

The day after Huzoor's visit, during Mulaqat, I mentioned that Huzoor's journey to the Fazl Mosque complex had taken longer than normal and asked if there had been a lot of traffic.

In reply, Huzoor said:

"Yes, there was a lot of traffic, however I had a file of correspondence in the car with me, which I went through during the journey and so no time was wasted."

Huzoor's work schedule is never ending. Each weekend, Huzoor's Virtual Mulaqats continued and during September, Huzoor addressed the *Ijtemas* of the three auxiliary organisations in the UK.

To the relief and joy of Ahmadis far and wide, after around 18 months, the routine of *'Family Mulaqats'* has resumed recently and are taking place several days a week.

"No one knew of me…"

Throughout this period, I continued to present regular media reports to Huzoor and to seek his guidance on various issues.

Occasionally, it is my duty to bring to attention of Huzoor things that are unpleasant and distressing.

For example, I recently became aware that there were people who were speculating on Khilafat and who might be the next Khalifa online.

Some of those discussing it were non-Ahmadis but it did seem that some Ahmadis were also part of the discussion.

Someone also mentioned to me that such discussions sometimes take place within Ahmadi homes as well.

Thus, one afternoon, I mentioned this to Huzoor.

In reply, Huzoor said:

"Those who discuss or try to predict the future Khulafa, are those who are consumed by worldliness and are actually speculating on how long they expect the present Khalifa to live. An Ahmadi who is sincere to Khilafat and to the Jamaat would never like to think about such things."

Thereafter, condemning such discussions and speaking about their futility, Huzoor said:

"Allah the Almighty is the one who chooses the Khalifa when He pleases and He makes the person who is unknown to the world become known to all. Who knew me before my Khilafat? No one knew of me but, for some reason, Allah desired to entrust this duty to me and so He guided the members of the Jamaat to this end. Look at Sharif Odeh sahib (Ameer Jamaat Kababir), he has said he did not know me or my face, yet when the election for the Fifth Khilafat took place something inside him compelled him (to vote for Huzoor). Other people had dreams indicating to them that I would become Khalifa."

Huzoor continued:

"Also, some people think that Khilafat is destined to remain in the family of the Promised Messiah (as), however there is no guarantee of this. In future, the Khalifa could be an African, a European or from some other nation. Allah has not bound himself to any one family, rather He will choose His Khalifa based on their righteousness. Thus, such discussions

about the future Khulafa are completely wrong and futile and speak to the worldliness of those who engage in them."

Twitter Spaces

In another office Mulaqat, I informed of a relatively new feature on Twitter known as 'Spaces'. Several national Jamaats and individual Ahmadis contacted me and mentioned that discussions were taking place on Twitter, often involving Ahmadi men and women on different issues.

Some expressed their concern that the forum was a means of increasing unnecessary social contact between unrelated Ahmadi men and women, whilst those in favour of using this service said it was simply a means of sharing information and knowledge.

Given that several people were enquiring, I presented the matter to Huzoor during Mulaqat.

In reply, Huzoor said:

"It may be that people are joining this forum with good intentions, such as to educate one another or to hold what they perceive to be positive discussions but they should remember that Hazrat Adam (as) was enticed and wrongly influenced by Satan in the name of righteousness. So, those who wish to participate in these mixed discussions or other such things should honestly assess if it is strictly essential. If they do, they should not display their photos."

Huzoor continued:

"Islam has taught men and women to 'lower their gaze' in order to protect them from dangerous situations and immorality. Often it is from a small or minor indiscretion or vice that larger vices or problems emerge. Anyway, in certain circumstances, one act may be appropriate but in different conditions the same act may be sinful and wrong. So, context has to be taken into account and this is why it is not always appropriate for the Jamaat to give a Fatwa or for Khalifatul Masih to give an outright directive either in favour or in rejection of the matter at hand. In such circumstances, Ahmadis should look at their own conscience and act with sense and wisdom and make sure they stay within the limits and boundaries imposed by Islam."

Huzoor's guidance showed how, where there are certain things that are categorically permissible or not permitted according to the teachings of Islam, there are certain issues which may not be as clear cut and context has to be considered and the potential harms and benefits should be weighed against one another.

I mentioned to Huzoor that some people had quoted the example of Hazrat Ayesha (ra) teaching Muslim men and felt that online discussions provided a similar means for Muslim women to educate others.

In response, Huzoor said:

"Hazrat Ayesha (ra) was Ummul Momineen, the mother of the believers, and the Holy Quran has afforded the wives of the Holy Prophet (sa) a

special status and testified to their righteousness. Further, Hazrat Ayesha would address Muslim men from behind a curtain and the Quran instructed the wives of the Holy Prophet (sa) to be firm in their manner of speech when addressing men."

Huzoor continued:

"The level of virtue and righteousness of Hazrat Ayesha (ra) was of the very highest order and an example for the believers. Where there was once an allegation of impropriety made against her, Allah the Almighty Himself gave witness to her truth and nobility. If Ahmadi women reach her status and standards of spirituality and righteousness then, by all means, they are free to teach and address men as she did. So, all our actions should be based on wisdom and after the consequences are considered, rather than immediately following the latest worldly trends."

A new studio at Islamabad

On Saturday, 18 September, I reported to Islamabad early morning because Huzoor had a Virtual Mulaqat with Lajna Imaillah Finland.

Upon arrival, I was informed that the Virtual Mulaqat would not take place in Huzoor's office, as had been the previous routine, but was due to take place in the newly opened MTA Studio in Islamabad.

The studio setting for the Virtual Mulaqat was quite plain and so, after the meeting, Huzoor instructed Munir Odeh sahib (*Director Production, MTA*

International) to arrange for some plants and other things to be used to decorate the Studio and make it visually more appealing for viewers.

Huzoor also gave instructions on how the Studio background, which has been designed in a way that resembles the Mubarak Mosque, could be extended slightly and improved.

Memorable moments in a garden

When the Virtual Mulaqat ended, Huzoor called me and said that I should come to his office. I was surprised, as I had already had an office Mulaqat earlier that morning and had nothing further to report or seek guidance on that day.

I thought that perhaps, Huzoor may wish to make some edits to his address at the *Khuddam Ijtema* the following day and which he had given me dictation for earlier in the week.

I certainly was not expecting what followed next.

Upon entering Huzoor's office, Huzoor pointed to 3 plums that were placed on one of the cabinets.

Huzoor said:

"I meant to give you these when you came this morning but I forgot. These are fresh plums from my fruit tree."

Thereafter, Huzoor took out a carrier bag and placed the three plums inside. He then opened the door to the private garden on his right, adjacent to the courtyard outside the building where *Wakalat-e-Maal* and the *Tamil-o-Tanfidh* offices are situated.

Huzoor showed me the plum tree and there were more than a dozen plums hanging from its branches.

One by one, Huzoor picked each and every plum and placed it in the carrier bag. Some of the plums were on branches that were quite high and so Huzoor had to reach up and pull down the branch towards him and take off the fruit. By the end, the bag was filled with plums which Huzoor gifted to me.

It was a great fortune and treasure to receive these fruits nurtured and hand-picked personally by Huzoor.

Then, Huzoor showed me the rest of his garden. There were beautiful flowers of many different vivid colours. Huzoor also showed me a miniature water fountain.

As he showed it, Huzoor said:

"This small fountain is for the birds so that they can come and drink water from it."

As I walked just behind Huzoor, the sun was shining and the background was perfect for a photo, with the resplendent flowers and fruit trees and I wished to ask Huzoor if I could take a photo of him. However, I thought better of it

and continued to enjoy those rare personal and informal moments in Huzoor's blessed company.

After a few minutes, Huzoor returned to the office and asked if he had ever shown me the garden on the other side of his office. I said that I had not seen it and so Huzoor took me through a room adjacent to his office and to a door leading to the garden on the other side.

Here too were an array of perfectly formed roses and other delightful flowers. With happiness, Huzoor spoke of their colours and it was clear how much Huzoor enjoyed observing nature and Allah's Creation. To my surprise, there was even an olive tree.

To the side, there were two small wooden outdoor chairs and upon seeing them, I said:

"Huzoor, when it is sunny, you should come and sit here and review your mail outside!"

In my heart, I was imagining a day where Huzoor would be working outside and perhaps I could present my Mulaqat report to Huzoor in that magnificent outdoor setting!

Huzoor smiled and then indicated that it was time for *Namaz* and so I left the office.

My heart was racing with pure joy and happiness. These were moments that I will, *Insha'Allah,* never forget.

Two *Ameens* and countless blessings

On 20 September 2021, Huzoor graciously permitted for us to have a family Mulaqat and approved our request for our sons Mahid and Moshahid to have the honour of an *Ameen* presided by Huzoor. They had both completed their first reading of the Holy Quran during the Covid pandemic.

I am always nervous before any Mulaqat or any time that I am fortunate enough to be in the presence of Huzoor. Yet, the nerves and tension before a family Mulaqat far exceeds those of an official *'daftari'* Mulaqat.

After picking up the children from school, we drove straight to Islamabad where we all undertook a rapid Covid test. We were all anxiously waiting for the results, fearing that our Mulaqat could be over before it started if, *God forbid*, any one tested positive. Thankfully, after a few minutes we were informed the tests were negative and we could proceed into the main area of Islamabad.

Prior to the family Mulaqat, Huzoor called me for a *daftari Mulaqat* where I presented a daily media briefing and sought guidance on a couple of issues. Once it was complete, Huzoor told me to wait outside with my family and that he would call us in shortly for the family Mulaqat.

Mala and the children were sitting outside in the *PS Office* and, as soon as I joined them, Jaweria came running to me. I could actually hear her whilst in Huzoor's office a few minutes before and Mala told me how she had been running in and out of the Private Secretary's Office. We were both fearing

how we would keep her under control whilst Mahid and Moshahid had their *Ameens*.

A few minutes passed and then the light flashed and Ghalib Javaid sahib, who was conducting the Mulaqats that day, indicated that we could enter.

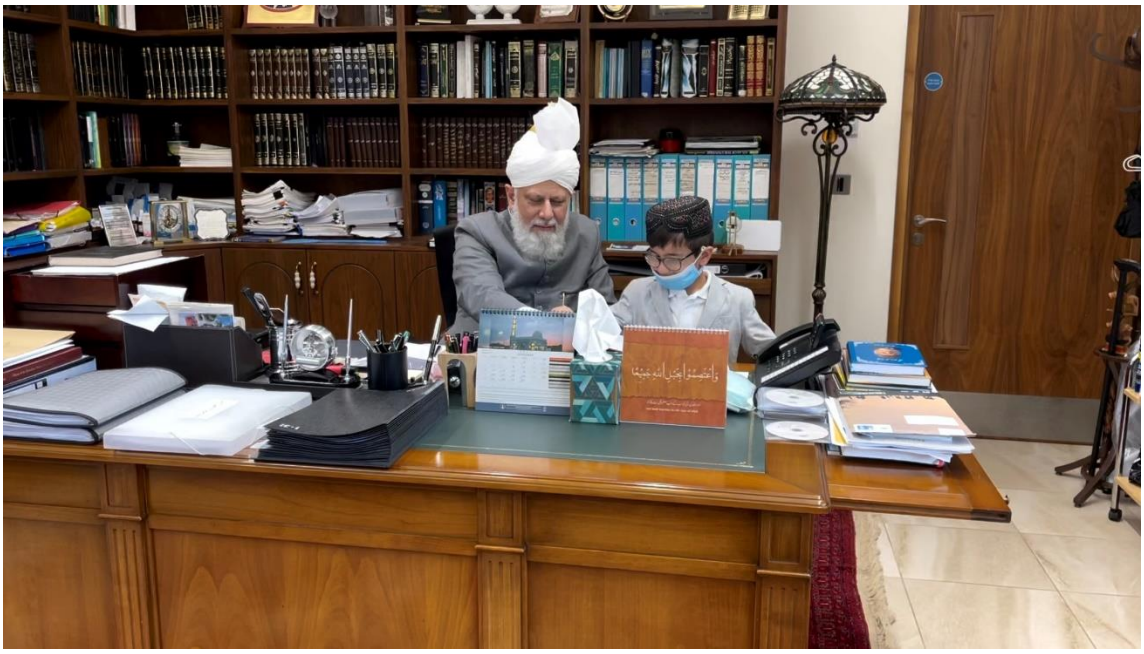
As soon as we entered Huzoor's office, we were greeted by Huzoor smiling.

Over the next few minutes, first Mahid and then Moshahid had the opportunity to recite a small portion of the Holy Quran at Huzoor's side.

Both of them, with the *Grace of Allah*, read well and we felt relief but, above all, happiness that they were being blessed with this opportunity.

Afterwards, Huzoor gifted both of them with a Holy Quran printed with the unique *khat-e-manzoor* font and encased in a wonderful green sleeved box. Huzoor wrote their names on the inside cover, wrote prayers and signed it.

Truly, it was the greatest gift our children could have ever received and one they and we, will *Insha'Allah* cherish forever.



Thereafter, Huzoor continued to bless us with his precious time and gifted chocolates to the whole family.

All the pre-Mulaqat nerves, were transformed into feelings of pure joy and happiness.

Transforming fear into peace

With the Grace of Allah, Huzoor has always shown immense love and kindness towards me and my family - far more than we could ever hope for or deserve.

However, during those days, whether it was when he visited Taalay's family at Masjid Fazl, whether it was when he was picking plums from his tree for

us or whether it was during that blessed family Mulaqat, Huzoor's love, care and benevolence was beyond all measure.

I cannot express the feelings of happiness, as we enjoyed Huzoor's company and I saw the look of unbridled joy on the faces of my wife and children.

Indeed, on the drive home, I remember thinking back to the night of Taalay's martyrdom and the feeling of sheer panic and desperation, the feelings of fear and grief. I remember how I wondered if I would be able to feel pure joy ever again.

The truth is, and always will be, that Huzoor held my hand and picked me up through his love and tenderness, by letting me spend even more time in his blessed company.

Purely, due to the blessings of Khilafat, I feel peace in my heart and the restlessness and agitation that I feared would consume me forever has given way to contentment.

Of course, the grief of Taalay's wife, children and parents far outweighs my own but they too have experienced the immense love and support of Khalifa-Waqt and *Insha'Allah* his prayers will give them the strength and fortitude to move forward.

There are many other things I could write - many other experiences of the past few weeks and months. Perhaps, I will write more in future *Insha'Allah* but for now, I pray with all my heart that may Allah the Almighty grant Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V (aba) a long and healthy life.

May we remain forever obedient to Khilafat and recognise this great spiritual treasure that Allah has bestowed to the members of the Jamaat of the Promised Messiah (as). *Ameen.*

End

Any comments or feedback: abid.khan@pressahmadiyya.com